

Detoured

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DETOURED

By Jeri Ellen

**PRELUDE: Minneapolis, MN.
December 24, 1977**

The security guard walked out of the rear door of the department store. He heard the click of the lock as he headed for the back of the armored truck.

Looking up at the sky he saw it was a clear and starlight night. It was going to be the last one that he and his partner would have in the chill of Minnesota. Their next night was going to be in the warmth and comfort of the state of Arizona.

After opening one of the two doors of the truck he deposited several bags of cash and checks in the rear of the truck. He closed and locked the door making sure it

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was secure, then walked to the front of the idling truck.

He got in the trucks' passenger side and fastened his seatbelt. Turning to the driver he smiled and nodded while pointing to the street at the end of the alley where they were parked. This was it. Two years in the planning had come down to this.

"Let's go," he said.

The driver put the truck in gear and drove down the alley to the cross street. He checked for traffic and then pulled out onto the street bringing the truck up to speed with the rest of the evening traffic.

A few blocks later he turned right and then left onto the 494 west freeway entrance. He merged the truck into the heavier traffic and then brought it up to freeway speed as they headed west.

It was just after 11pm when they passed the freeway exit that would have taken them to the connecting street that led to the armory. The guard in the passenger seat checked his watch, and then nodded to his partner behind the wheel. They were on schedule and everything was proceeding according to their plan.

Fifteen minutes later the driver of the armored truck took the Eden Prairie exit. At the bottom of the exit ramp he turned left and several blocks later turned off on a side street. It was darker in this area of town and there was no traffic at this late hour.

Shortly he pulled into a covered storage facility. He drove to the end of one of the rows and stopped the truck just to one side of a garage size unit. He checked both side mirrors to insure that they hadn't been followed and no one else was around.

The guard in the passenger seat got out and unlocked the door. Shortly he backed out a tan four door sedan and parked it in front of the adjoining unit. After opening the sedans' trunk he joined the other guard inside the storage unit.

The other guard drove the truck inside the unit and turned off the ignition. As he exited the truck the first guard closed the garage door and then opened both of the rear doors of the armored truck. Momentarily both men stared at the bags of cash and boxes of coins.

Working quickly the two men opened the bags of money and transferred the large bills to a sheet of heavy plastic on a small table. After wrapping the bills tightly, the package was sealed with duct tape and then placed in a large duffle bag.

When both duffle bags were full they closed and secured them with a combination padlock. They had left behind the boxes and bags of coins as well as the checks. Bills with small denominations, those less than a twenty-dollar bill, were also left behind.

Next the two men undressed. From two garment bags the men put on sport coats, white shirts, a tie, slacks and dress shoes. One of them put on a blonde wig and mustache while the other put on a black wig and a black beard.

Each man pocketed a wallet stuffed with some of the left over bills, new ID's and credit cards along with new passports and clean handkerchiefs.

Both men looked each other over carefully and then both of them took a last look around the storage area. Each man grabbed a duffle bag and a grey plastic suitcase.

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Outside of the storage area the men put their luggage in the trunk of the tan sedan. One guard locked the storage garage door and then got in the passenger side of the tan sedan as the other guard started the car. The guard on the passenger side fastened his seatbelt and then checked his watch.

Everything had gone smoothly and they were right on schedule. It was just after midnight. No one at the armory would be concerned just yet as the Christmas Eve traffic was still heavy. Being a little late was no big deal. He turned to his partner behind the wheel.

“Let’s go,” he said.

The driver put the car in gear and drove out to the street. Twenty minutes later the driver parked the sedan in the customer parking lot in front of Northwest Charters Inc. One of the guards checked his watch and then nodded to the other.

“Right on schedule,” he said.

The two men got out and retrieved their luggage from the trunk. The driver tossed the car keys and the storage keys in the trunk then slammed the lid shut. The two men went inside the building and walked up to the front counter.

They checked in with the man behind the counter.

“Have a seat gents, we’ll be ready to board in a few minutes,” he said.

The two men did so and sat down to wait along with two other men who would be flying with them. Shortly a uniformed man came up to them.

“We’re ready to go. Please follow me,” he said.

They followed him back to where the plane was parked and walked up the ramp steps behind the two business men who had arrived there ahead of them.

“You can put your luggage in the back, then have a seat up front and fasten your seat belts. We will be taking off in a few minutes,” he said.

The four men did as they were told and soon the plane began backing away from the charter terminal. The plane taxied down to the end of the runway and stopped. The wait seemed longer than it was.

Twenty minutes later they were airborne. The guard on the right side of the passenger compartment checked his watch again. He nodded at his companion on the other side of the aisle and made an “OK” sign with the thumb and forefinger of his right hand.

Everything had gone off like clockwork. They had planned well and were happy that there had been no delays or glitches. It was just after one thirty am. Both men settled back into their seats happy that everything had gone so well.

At the armory their failure to arrive even late plus not answering their radio calls was now alarming and law enforcement authorities who have been notified were on the look out for them.

This had never happened before and the shift supervisor was beginning to worry despite the fact that both of the guards had exemplary records with the company. Never the less it was better to be safe than sorry so the authorities had to be notified.

The Twin Cities was a huge metro area and there were numerous armored couriers making pickups as well as countless hiding places where one of them could disappear in without a trace. The guards knew

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that it would be difficult to begin the search not knowing where to start.

Several hours went by and the charter flight landed in Denver, Colorado. The pilot opened the door and let the two business men off who had been traveling with the guards. He stood in front of the two men.

“We have to refuel before we continue. There is a storm front moving in with strong headwinds. We may have to return to Denver. If you want to go inside and have breakfast you can but it will delay us a little longer, it is entirely up to you,”

“Let’s go,” said one of the guards.

The pilot shrugged. After refueling the pilot closed the door and returned to the cockpit. Twenty minutes later they were airborne again and the guard on the passenger side checked his watch. They were still on schedule and there hadn’t been any problems.

Back at the armory there would be some real concern now. The guards had been model employees. The two men had honorable discharges from the Navy after serving four years with the shore patrol, the Navy’s police force.

After a year with Florida Armored they had returned to the Twin Cities to work for the company. There would be no reason for suspecting that these two would ever try pulling something like this. It had come as a complete surprise to the staff.

The shift supervisor was baffled. The company had never suffered a loss in the twenty five years they had been in business and now it appeared that their record was about to be forever altered as if nothing good lasts forever and all good things must come to an end.

An hour and a half into their flight the plane began to shake a little as the outer edge of the storm that had been pushing in from the west coast began to close in on them faster than the pilot had expected. The buffeting winds were moderate to begin with but then they increased.

Soon the plane began to vibrate even more and the seatbelt light came on. Both men complied but remained unconcerned. They had come this far and they weren't about to let a little wind and snow put a crimp in their early retirement plans.

With shocking suddenness, the plane nose dived and fell several thousand feet. It slipped from side to side and the two guards knew the pilot was obviously having trouble controlling the plane which now appeared to be in the grips of this fierce storm.

Both of the men were now more concerned about this leg of their flight. They had passed up breakfast in Denver hoping to save a little time, thereby expediting their escape. That may have been a mistake. About all they could do now was to try to sit back, try to relax, and hope for the best.

The planes' nose dipped again, more sharply this time. Now they were flying at a downward angle. Both guards looked at each other with grim faces. There was no point in looking out of the window as everything was black anyway.

Neither man had planned on winding up as victims of a plane crash but at this point all they could do was hang on to the arm rests and hope they weren't going to wind up plastered on the side of a mountain.

There was a loud bang from the rear of the plane as a low hanging tree limb sheared off the rudder and

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then the shock from the impact as the plane hit the ground. It cut a forty yard swath thru some small trees as it slid along the ground and then up a rocky ledge.

Like a skier going off a ski jump the plane sailed off the ledge and over the frozen surface of a small lake. With the rudder missing the plane dipped left and then nose dived hitting the frozen surface of the lake in a straight down attitude.

The impact crumpled the nose knocking the pilot unconscious and bending the wings back. The plane broke thru the ice and the cockpit filled with water as it began to sink beneath the surface. The unconscious pilot soon drowned where he sat.

In the passenger compartment the two guards, jostled around by the sudden and violent impact, unbuckled their seat belts. As the plane began filling with icy water they both struggled trying to open the passenger door but it wouldn't budge.

Quickly they moved to the back of the plane where the fuselage had cracked open several feet from the tail. There only hope lay with the possibility that the crack was wide enough for them to get out.

They discovered that the crack was only about fourteen inches wide. Too narrow for the men to get out and they couldn't go back to the front either as it was already under water. Fear and panic consumed the two men and shortly they too drowned where they were.

The plane continued to sink more rapidly. The weight of the water had filled the front of the plane first and caused it to right itself near the bottom of the lake just before it struck the bottom.

It impacted the muddy bottom sitting upright with the tail section breaking off just before it hit bottom but it was too late to give the two guards inside a wider opening to get out. The muck swirled up around the plane and then slowly dissipated.

Above the surface of the lake the wind continued to howl and the snow continued to fall. Within an hour the point of the planes impact had frozen over again and the heavy snowfall had covered the refrozen hole completely leaving no trace of the planes impact.

If any one looked at the middle of the lake regardless of their vantage point you would never have know that an airplane had crashed thru the ice there. It was almost as if the crash hadn't happened at all.

The massive storm continued for another day and a half. When the skies finally cleared rescue planes were sent out to the missing flight's last known position but trying to find a white plane with a blue stripe in the all white frozen landscape beneath the search planes was like trying to find the preverbal needle in a haystack.

The search was called off when a second storm front moved in. After that storm cleared the search was postponed until spring when most of the snow pack would have melted making it easier to spot any trace of the missing aircraft.

Back in Minneapolis pictures of the missing armored truck and the two guards was published in the newspapers and broadcast over the nightly news. The theft had come as a shock to the company as it had always prided itself on hiring good people.

The missing money was reported to be just over two million dollars. An exact audit was being done and the armored courier company representative de-

clined to comment any further on the incident. Law enforcement officials declined any comment as well citing that they were just beginning their investigation.

A reward was offered but all the tips it brought in turned out to be dead ends which any investigator would tell you was not unusual. Things like this tended to bring out just about every nut case in the country and sometimes even outside of the country.

Thirty days later the car rental company filed a missing car report with the police and they located it in the parking lot of Northwest Charters Inc. In addition to the car keys in the trunk the police found two other keys but had no idea what they were for. The man who had rented it had paid cash and matched the description of one of the missing guards.

The clerk at the charter company described the two men who booked the late night flight but their description didn't match that of either of the two missing guards. At this point the investigation seemed to be stalled.

By the end of the week the story of the missing guards and their truck was dropped from the news and quickly forgotten by most of the people of the Twin Cities. With no subsequent developments in the coming weeks there was no news to report.

In the unusually early and warm spring search planes spent a week resuming the hunt for the missing charter flight but couldn't locate it. Any further searches were called off by the end of the week. There was just too much country to be left to search and too little chance that the plane or any part of it would ever be located.

The FBI and Minnesota authorities continued their investigation hoping to find new leads. It looked like the two men had gotten away with this massive theft and then disappeared along with their truck into thin air despite all of the press and media coverage.

After several months the manager of the storage area, unable to locate the man who had rented one of the garage size storage units to collect further rent, opened the area in question and discovered the abandoned armored truck, money and clothing.

He immediately called the police and the FBI was notified. Pictures of the truck and the inside of the storage unit were published and broadcast on the TV news.

More calls came into the police department. None of them panned out as the investigation continued to drag on. No further press releases were given and the investigation was relegated by the media to "old news."

A year passed and then two. There was an occasional follow up story by the TV stations but neither the FBI nor the local authorities had anything new to report. Eventually no further mention was made of the crime. The media soon lost interest.

I suppose my story is no different than thousands of others like me. I knew at a very early age that something was wrong but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. I knew I was a boy, I mean a male, but I didn't feel like one. I felt like I was in the wrong body. Mother Nature had definitely made a mistake with me. I should have been born a girl.